

VZCZCXRO8735  
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHBK #3252/01 3040616  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 300616Z OCT 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4874  
INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6461  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9151  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 5012  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1144  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2499  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 5778

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003252

SIPDIS

NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: SOUTHERN THAILAND: PM VISITS; CROWN PRINCESS  
CONCERNED WITH EDUCATION; ARMY SAYS SECURITY IMPROVED

REF: A. BANGKOK 2882  
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 941

BANGKOK 00003252 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Crown Princess Sirindhorn told the Ambassador October 27 that she was concerned with how the Thai government was utilizing the already abundant educational resources that the RTG directed towards the South. During an October 28 visit to southern Thailand, Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat and Army Commander Anupong appeared more at ease with each other than during previous joint public appearances. PM Somchai said publicly that he would focus on improving public services in the South. Deputy Army Commander General Jiradej told the Ambassador October 29 that the security situation in the South had improved but that much work remained to be done by the government.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: It is noteworthy that Somchai, a native of Nakhorn Sri Thammarat province in the mid-south, visited the deep South early in his tenure. He told Ambassador prior to assuming responsibilities as PM that he would make the South a priority (Ref A). However, the ongoing political conflict in Bangkok and expectations that his government may not last long temper hopes for significant national government efforts to address the issues at the heart of the insurgency. The Prime Minister's visit and increased policy focus on the South, if it comes to fruition, may also work to build a closer relationship with General Anupong, who has demonstrated much more interest in improving the security situation in the South than did his predecessor. End comment.

SOMCHAI AND ANUPONG TOUR THE SOUTH  
-----

[1](#)3. (U) In what could indicate more focus by the Thai government on the southern insurgency, Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat October 28 made his first visit to the South since taking office in late September. Somchai was accompanied by Army Commander General Anupong Paochinda. In pictures published October 29 in the Thai press, Somchai and Anupong appeared much more at ease with each other than in previous public appearances. The Prime Minister publicly said he

thought the situation in the South had improved, but more work was needed. Somchai indicated that he would try to improve public services through supporting families of government officials in the South and by improving the education system.

#### PRINCESS CONCERNED WITH SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH

-----

14. (C) During an October 27 courtesy call by the Ambassador at the Chitralada Palace, Crown Princess Sirindhorn said she was very concerned with the state of the public education system in southern Thailand. The Thai government had dedicated more resources for schools in the South than in other areas but, because of the inefficient application of those resources, southern schools were still unable to provide students with the tools to integrate into Thai society. Muslim schools in the South taught Koran-based religious studies for one-half of the day in an attempt to allow ethnic Malay Muslims to embrace their cultural identity, Sirindhorn said. The other half of the day was spent on traditional subjects such as mathematics and social studies. That half the school day was spent on studies that did not provide southern students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in universities held southerners back from being able to find jobs that would integrate them into society, Sirindhorn maintained. Compounding matters even more was that the Islamic studies were taught in the morning, a time when students were much more alert and better able to learn, she said.

15. (C) Sirindhorn also noted problems in the university entrance system in Thailand. The Princess said that 40 years ago the Thai government had conducted a program via wQh

BANGKOK 00003252 002.2 OF 002

students from the South had a dedicated path to enter universities. Southerners would compete with other students from the area for set aside slots at Bangkok universities, traditionally the best in Thailand; those granted admission had been provided an additional year of preparation after high school graduation prior to entering university. This was a good system, Sirindhorn said, as students gained the skills to succeed in university. Unfortunately, the system was no longer utilized by the Thai government.

#### ARMY SAYS SITUATION IN THE SOUTH IMPROVING

-----

16. (C) During a October 29 meeting (domestic political and Cambodian issues reported septel) Royal Thai Army Deputy Commander General Jiradej Kotcharat told the Ambassador that the situation in the South had improved since General Anupong had taken over the command of the Army. Anupong had ordered a substantial increase in the number of troops in the South in late 2007, and security forces now received better cooperation from the local population, particularly in the form of information on insurgents. Jiradej said Anupong's efforts to reach out to religious, political, and community leaders in the South had also been a catalyst in improving the situation in insurgent areas. Jiradej also attributed the improved security situation to the Army and the police getting better at developing leads from forensic evidence from bombing incidents.

17. (C) Jiradej admitted to the Ambassador that, despite improvements in security and in relations with the local communities, dealing with the southern insurgency remained a long-term problem. The government would have to focus on non-security areas such as increasing cross-cultural understanding, improving the education system, and helping at-risk youth.

18. (C) Jiradej told the Ambassador that Anupong was committed to holding accountable any soldier who committed abuses. The

Army Commander had implemented a policy of strict punishment for any soldier that committed an offense, not only for human rights but for other crimes such as robbery or sexual abuse. There would be no double standard; the Army would prosecute soldiers just as severely as it would insurgents, Jiradej claimed. (Note: Despite the Army's insistence that soldiers are being held to a strict standard, we continue to monitor closely the Thai justice system's handling of cases of alleged human rights abuses, such as the case of Imam Yapa from earlier this year. Ref B.)

JOHN